(b) if so, to what extent, in spite of differences on various issues, Government are confident of improving the relations with USA; and

(c) whether Pakistan and other countries, have opposed Indo-US joint military exercise?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) Yes.

(b) The two sides share a political commitment, articulated by Prime Minister and United States President George Bush in November 2001, to complete the process of transforming their bilateral relations and are pursuing broad-based dialogue and cooperation in pursuit of that goal.

(c) Government has seen reports in this regard. Relations between India and the United States, including in the area of defence, are based on shared interests and are not determined by other countries.

Strategic Cooperation Between India and USA

2403. SHRI RUMANDLA RAMACHANDRAYYA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether a new era of strategic co-operation between India and USA is on cards in the year 2003;

(b) if so, what are the details of the new strategies that have been set for further expansion of Indo-US relationship;

(c) what are the issues on which both have agreed and have signed agreements;

(d) what are the agreements which have not so far been signed and are with some differences; and

(e) to what extent the US and India's relations have further improved?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) India and the United States are engaged in an ongoing process of implementing the shared political commitment of the Prime Minister and United States President George Bush to transform their bilateral relations to achieve their many common goals in Asia and beyond.

(b) The two sides are pursuing a broad-based dialogue, both at the political level and through established bilateral formus, to deepen understanding and expand cooperation in all areas of mutual interest.

(c) The two sides are in agreement on a number of bilateral, regional and international issues and have entered into signed agreements, memorandums of understanding or programmes of collaborative activities, where necessary, in areas such as high technology commerce, space, energy, environment, health, science and technology, economic relations, counter-terrorism and defence.

(d) There are presently no such agreements.

(e) There has been a significant improvement in India-United States relations.

Ban on Celebration of Bengal New Year

2404. SHRI C.P. THIRUNAVUKKARASU: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that in Bangladesh some movements are demanding a ban on celebration of Bengal New Year and on Indian TV Channels; and

(b) if so, Government's reaction thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI VINOD KHANNA): (a) Articles and comments advocating ban/restriction on celebration of Bengal New Year and on broadcast of Indian TV channels appear from time to time in sections of the Bangladeshi media.

(b) The government has not taken cognisance of such media reports.

Harassment of Employees of Indian High Commission in Pakistan

†2405. SHRI JAYANTILAL BAROT: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) the number of employees posted in the office of Indian High Commission in Pakistan;

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.